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PLANNING AN ANNUAL
INSERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM

Training is a personnel management tool which cannot be set aside until the performance of each extension worker has reached its maximum effectiveness. Training is especially valuable when new programs or changes in old programs require increase in staff size, reassignments and the development of skills to meet new demands. The Extension Service faces just such a time now. Supervisors and leaders of training working with training committees might with profit set up a systematic planning process to consider needs, goals, and resources.

I. Diagnosing Training Needs.

It is wasteful to plan for training opportunities without knowing specifically which workers will benefit most from training and without knowing specifically what skills each needs to develop.

Some of the steps in diagnosing training needs are rather obvious, done almost automatically. They are set forth here with the thought that a conscious process of analysis will result in a more systematic approach and result in better use of training time and resources.

Three steps are described:

1. Locating areas where training may be needed.
2. Identifying the individual worker in need of training:
 - a. Through self-appraisal.
 - b. Through day-to-day observation by supervisor and specialists
3. Determining the specific nature of training needs through annual evaluation.

Step 1. Locating areas where training may be needed.

Identifying specific training needs is an essential first step in planning a comprehensive training program. Information that indicates the following conditions should be examined:

a. Direct evidences of inadequate or inefficient work production:

Excessive backlog of work; failure to meet deadlines.
Excessive hours of overtime work.
Excessive time spent at low grade jobs.
Failure to initiate work on significant problems.
Limited or erroneous information being taught.
Lack of skill in methods.

- b. Indirect evidences: (These are problems that cannot be completely solved by training. When underlying causes have been determined it is then possible to decide whether training can help to improve such situations.)

Type 1

Turnover
Grievances
Faulty public relations
Marked drop-offs in participation of rural people

Type 2

Changes in job assignments
Changes in program emphases
New developments in research (subject matter or methods)

A planning worksheet may be effectively used for the purpose of collecting evidences of inadequate or inefficient production or of other problems. (See Item A.)

Step 2. Identifying the individual worker in need of training.

a. Self-appraisal by individual worker.

Even in the early days of employment extension workers often recognized their own needs for training. Since improvement is an active process, the worker himself, for best results, should be enlisted in making a self-appraisal of training needs. A check sheet to be filled out by extension agents or State personnel and summarized for all workers by supervisors or leaders of training can be a helpful device. (See Item B attached.)

b. Direct approach through supervisor's day to day observation.

Day after day the supervisor is conscious of the needs of his agents for training. He studies their job descriptions to determine what the job requires. He observes workers and appraises their attitudes, skills and output on present assignments, as well as qualifications for upgrading. He is aware of any gap between what he expects the worker to accomplish and the actual output of the worker.

Usually this process of weighing is very informal and the supervisor may not even realize that he is making evaluations of personnel and observing specific needs for training. Nevertheless, this sort of observation provides the starting point for planning the necessary training.

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The leader of training and the specialists should work with the supervisor in carrying out this process of appraisal. By adopting a planned approach, it will be easier for the supervisor to gather the information needed. His judgments will become more accurate for use in all relationships. The attached Performance Observation Sheet (Item C) may be useful to supervisors for the purpose of noting needs for training. One State, New Mexico, has a permanent individual training record form to be kept by the supervisor in the personnel folder of each individual agent.

The record system for keeping tab on each individual extension worker - experienced as well as inexperienced - may become too great a task in itself unless it is reduced to simple terms. The one page Performance Observation Sheet is an attempt to provide a simple form which can give the supervisor, specialist, or leader of training some month by month record of what he has observed on visits to the counties. These can be used later as reminders for the annual evaluation.

Step 3. Determining specific nature of need on basis of clear-cut standards of performance.

Where clear-cut goals or performance requirements are developed, these standards form a yardstick which the supervisor with the help of specialists and leader of training can use annually in determining the quality and quantity of output of the worker and for spotting those who would benefit from training.

Quite a number of States use evaluation sheets to identify the individual in need of training and the areas of need. Some basic principles to follow in drafting such sheets are:

1. It is desirable that State Extension Services have a plan of evaluating the work of their entire staff, State and county. If any value lies in the use of an evaluation sheet, the sheet should be used to scrutinize the effectiveness of the supervisor and specialist as well as that of the agent.
2. Evaluation forms should be used to evaluate the educational program and not used solely to rate a worker as a person. Attention should be focused on what happens as a result of the extension worker's efforts (on results and activities) rather than on the personal characteristics of the worker himself.

3. An evaluation plan should be initiated only after the ones whose work is to be appraised have been stimulated to desire an evaluation and are willing to participate in setting up a plan and in using it to check their work. An evaluation form should be self-made -- that is, made by the representative of the persons whose work is appraised. Committees appointed to prepare evaluation sheets should be composed of a cross-section of the extension staff, State and county.
4. The use of an evaluation sheet should extend over a period of years in order to show developments.
5. Persons who are to work out the evaluation sheets should be given ample training beforehand.
6. The evaluation sheet should be so constructed that the bases for judging are defined. Greater objectivity is made possible in this way. These bases for judgment should be built into the evaluation sheet, not worked out separately as independent value judgments each time the sheet is used. Brevity is not necessarily a criterion for a good evaluation sheet. It is very helpful to have clues indicated as to levels of performance which are good or poor in evaluating the work done on each item in the sheet. These clues indicating levels of performance seem to make a sheet lengthy and complicated, but in reality they can make its use simpler and more objective.
7. An evaluation sheet should allow for flexibility in its application. It should recognize the principle of individual differences in extension workers and strive to avoid encouraging stereotype performance.
8. No attempt should be made to assign numerical values to the different items on an evaluation sheet. Evaluation should not be a means of indicating the rank order of persons rated.
9. Evaluation sheets should be comprehensive enough to cover all the major functions they endeavor to analyze, but should not attempt to include minor details on every phase of extension work. The inclusion of too many details, particularly trivial ones, may be a hindrance rather than a help.
10. In using an evaluation device more than one person should make each checking. These persons should be familiar with the work to be evaluated, should work independently and should be asked to justify their evaluations by citing evidence.

11. Evaluation sheets should be modified and revised in the light of evidence found as to their validity and usefulness. There should be no hesitancy in discarding any element which is found to be of no value.
12. The results of evaluations should be discussed by the supervisor with the individual workers and plans made to bring about improvements. The chief purpose of such a check list is that of diagnosis and self-analysis and the element of rating should play an unimportant part.

II. Determining Specific Training Plans After Worker Needing Training is Identified.

After the supervisor has used day to day observations and an annual appraisal of each extension worker's performance to identify those who need training, he must carry the analysis one step further. He must identify the nature of the specific knowledge, skill or attitude which the total group of workers under his supervision need to improve and indicate the time when training will take place. The training committee can now go to work to combine these needs into an annual plan for training activities.

The way to improve the end product is to improve performance on the series of tasks leading up to that product. In few cases can complete improvement come from one training activity. A coordinated annual plan (See Item D attached) can be worked out with a view to using all training opportunities toward the accomplishment of the improvements needed. By means of this plan the supervisor and leader of training can bring some continuity in training activities and can make better use of time and resources used in training.

Individuals or groups planning for specific training opportunities or activities often fail to go so far as to work out the objectives of the activity. Planning committees approach their task from the standpoint of "Who will be a good speaker?" or "Whom shall we invite to serve on the program?" There is less often an attempt to think through "What do we want to accomplish?" "What are our objectives for this training activity?"

A short form (Item E) to be filled out by the members of planning committees working on specific training activities can help to:

- (1) Pin down our purposes and expectations for the activity or event.
- (2) Record what happened one year for use on future occasions. The activity program alone seldom provides this sort of record.

Summary. The steps which are outlined here are intended as an outline of a process of thinking by means of which the supervisor, the leader of training and the training committee will set up a specific annual program to meet the training needs of extension workers.



